



# ZIGZAG TUNNEL

1890 Construction of the Northfield  
Tunnel in Merrickville NY



Picture From [Franklin Railroad and Community Museum](#)

December 19, 1890 - The Ontario & Western's Merrickville Tunnel (also known as the Northfield Tunnel, or Zigzag Tunnel) opens in the Town of Franklin.

Below is a transcription of a local news article on the opening:

...The average size of the heading throughout is 9 x 20 feet or 180 square feet and the distance in from the portal to the breast at the time of writing is 1,490 feet. The tunnel is being run from the north end only against a grade of 1.25 per 100 feet, and the distance from the breast to the south portal, which will be about 1,620 feet from the north end, grows 13 feet less every day. Work is going on night and day, a night shift and a day shift consisting of 24 men each, relieving each other alternately. At 6, evening and morning, the tunnel blasts are fired, and between blasts the "muckers" are working steadily removing the pile of rock thrown out by the last blast. The drill runners are running their machines as fast as possible in order to get a new set of holes in the breast for the next blast, for a delay means a round lost. The holes are loaded with dynamite and connected by wires to an electric battery placed about 400 feet away. The signal is given and presto! a yawning wedge-shaped cavity appears in the breast, two more

shots are fired, breaking away the rock from the sides and top, and seven feet more of tunnel is made.

"The best time on record in tunneling the world over was made at the Zig-Zag tunnel. In a little over seven months 1,627 feet was made through the hill."

Morning of the opening dawned bright and clear, and about 50 invited guests... boarded the Utica train for the tunnel. The press was well represented...

The train stopped near the top of the hill to let the people off, and down they tumbled through the snow to the south approach of the tunnel. The women were even more enthusiastic than the men and at first arranged themselves along the upper terrace of the cut, but soon slid down and crowded to the edge of the embankment. Spectators were afraid of the dynamite blast, and visions of a sudden trip to the moon floated through their minds.

Dusky Workers Agog

The electric wires were connected. There was a dull report; the earth trembled and everyone rushed for a nearer view of the effect; but this was only a preparation for a larger blast and men were already running for more dynamite. The dusky tunnel workers were all agog with excitement, as were spectators.

The second blast was charged and again there was a scattering from the portal of the tunnel and a rush up the ladder and up the slippery incline. Bang! The rock and stone flew this time. There was a hole through the mountain. A loud hurrah went up from the crowd. The men rushed again to the opening. Babcock threw off his overcoat and squeezed himself into the narrow opening, too small to admit a man passing. On the other side was the assistant engineer, L. D. Fouquet, and a crowd of dusky workers. Mr. Fouquet had crawled through the narrow aperture snake fashion, until he came to the last few feet. This was too small, but he shook hands with Mr. McHale through the opening. Then more powder was brought and again the crowd scrambled up the ladder. At a warning from Mr. Wheeler, the women retreated, and it was well they did, for this time came a loud report and rock and earth shot out from the mouth of the tunnel like grape and canister from an immense cannon.

Hurrah! A loud shout goes up and out of the black hole staggers L.D. Fouquet, more dead than alive and covered with muck and soot as though he might be an inhabitant of the infernal regions in the center of the earth. Fouquet was the first man to pass through the tunnel from portal to portal...